

A
LETTER
OF THE
Lord Bishop of *LONDON*
TO THE
MASTERS and MISTRESSES of Families
IN THE
English PLANTATIONS Abroad;

Exhorting them to Encourage and Promote the
Instruction of their NEGROES in the Christian
Faith.

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THE Care of the Plantations
abroad being committed to
the Bishop of LONDON as
to Religious Affairs; I have
thought it my Duty to make
particular Enquiries into the
State of Religion in those Parts, and to
learn, among other Things, what Numbers
of Slaves are employ'd within the several
Governments, and what Means are used for
their Instruction in the Christian Faith. I
find the Numbers are prodigiously great;
and am not a little troubled, to observe how
small a Progress has been made in a Chri-
stian Country, towards the delivering those
poor Creatures from the Pagan Darknes

and Superstition in which they were bred, and the making them Partakers of the Light of the Gospel, and of the Blessings and Benefits belonging to it. And, which is yet more to be lamented, I find there has not only been very little Progress made in the Work, but that all *Attempts* towards it have been by too many industriously discouraged and hinder'd; partly, by magnifying the *Difficulties* of the Work beyond what they really are; and partly, by mistaken Suggestions of the Change which *Baptism* would make in the Condition of the *Negroes*, to the Loss and Disadvantage of their Masters.

I. As to the Difficulties; it may be pleaded, that the Negroes are *grown Persons* when they come over, and that having been accusom'd to the Pagan Rites and Idolatries of their own Country, they are prejudiced against all other Religions, and more particularly against the Christian, as forbidding all that Licentiousness which is usually practis'd among the Heathens. But if this were a good Argument against attempting the Conversion of Negroes, it would follow, that the Gospel is never to be further propagated than it is at present; and that no Endeavours are to be us'd for the Conversion of Heathens, at any Time, or in
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any Country whatsoever ; because all Heathens have been accustom'd to Pagan Rites and Idolatries, and to such vicious and licentious Living, as the Christian Religion forbids. But yet, God be thank'd, Heathens have been converted, and Christianity propagated, in all Ages, and almost all Countries, through the zeal and diligence of pious and good Men ; and this, without the Help of Miracles. And if the present Age be as zealous and diligent in pursuing the proper *Means* of Conversion, we have no Reason to doubt, but that the divine Assistance is, and will be, the same in all Ages.

But a further Difficulty is, that they are utter Strangers to our Language, and we to their's ; and the Gift of Tongues being now ceas'd, there is no Means left of instructing them in the Doctrines of the Christian Religion. And this, I own, is a real Difficulty, as long as it continues, and as far as it reaches. But, if I am rightly inform'd, many of the Negroes, who are grown Persons when they come over, do of themselves attain so much of our Language, as enables them to understand, and to be understood, in Things which concern the ordinary Business of Life ; and they who can go so far of their own accord, might

might doubtless be carried much further, if proper Methods and Endeavours were us'd to bring them to a competent Knowledge of our Language, with a pious View to the instructing them in the Doctrines of our Religion. At least, some of them, who are more capable and more serious than the rest, might be easily instructed both in our Language and Religion, and then be made use of to convey Instruction to the rest in their own Language. And this, one would hope, may be done with great Ease, wherever there is a hearty and sincere zeal for the Work.

But whatever Difficulties there may be in instructing those who are *grown up* before they are brought over; there are not the like Difficulties in the Case of their Children, who are born and bred in our Plantations, who have never been accusom'd to Pagan Rites and Superstitions, and who may easily be trained up, like all other Children, to any Language whatsoever, and particularly to our own; if the making them good Christians be sincerely the Desire and Intention of those, who have the Property in them, and the Government over them.

But supposing the Difficulties to be much greater than I imagine; they are not such as
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render the Work *impossible*, so as to leave no Hope of any *Degree* of Success; and nothing less than an *Impossibility* of doing any good at all, can warrant our giving over and laying aside all Means and Endeavours, where the Propagation of the Gospel, and the saving of Souls, are immediately concern'd.

Many Undertakings look far more impracticable before Trial, than they are afterwards found to be in Experience; especially, where there is not a good Heart to go about them: And it is frequently observ'd, that small Beginnings, when pursued with Resolution, are attended with great and surprizing Success. But in no Case is the Success more great and surprizing, than when good Men engage in the Cause of God and Religion, out of a just Sense of the inestimable Value of a Soul, and in a full and well-grounded Assurance, that their honest Designs and Endeavours for the promoting Religion, will be supported by a special Blessing from God.

I am loath to think so hardly of any *Christian* Master, as to suppose that he can *deliberately hinder* his Negroes from being instructed in the Christian Faith; or, which is the same Thing, that he can, upon sober and mature Consideration of the Case, finally resolve to deny

deny them the *Means* and *Opportunities* of Instruction: Much less may I believe, that he can, after he has seriously weigh'd this Matter, permit them to labour on the Lord's Day; and least of all, that he can put them under a kind of *Necessity* of labouring on that Day, to provide themselves with the *Conveniencies* of Life; since our Religion so plainly teaches us, That God has given one Day in seven to be a Day of Rest, not only to Man, but to the Beasts; That it is a Day which is appointed by Him for the Improvement of the Soul, as well as the Refreshment of the Body; and that it is a Duty incumbent upon Masters, to take Care that all Persons, who are under their Government, keep this Day holy, and employ it to the pious and wise Purposes, for which God our great Lord and Master intended it. Nor can I think so hardly of any Missionary, who shall be desir'd by the Master to direct and assist in the Instruction of his Negroes (either on that Day, or on any other, when he shall be more at Leisure,) as to suppose that he will not embrace such Invitation with the utmost Readiness and Chearfulness, and give all the Help that is fairly consistent with the necessary Duties of his Function, as a Parochial Minister.

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If it be said, that no Time can be spar'd from the daily Labour and Employment of the Negroes, to instruct them in the Christian Religion ; this is in Effect to say, that no Consideration of propagating the Gospel of God, or Saving the Souls of Men, is to make the *least Abatement* from the temporal Profit of the Masters ; and that God cannot, or will not, make up the little they may lose in that Way, by blessing and prospering their Undertakings by Sea and Land, as a just Reward of their zeal for his Glory, and the Salvation of Mens Souls. In this Case, I may well reason as St. *Paul* does in a Case not unlike it, that if they make you Partakers of their Temporal Things, (of their Strength and Spirits, and even of their Offspring you ought to make them Partakers of your Spiritual Things, tho' it should abate somewhat of the Profit which you might otherwise receive from their Labours. And considering the *Greatness* of the Profit that is receiv'd from their Labours, it might be hop'd that all Christian Masters, those especially who are possess'd of considerable Numbers, should also be at some small *Expense* in providing for the Instruction of those poor Creatures ; and that others, whose Numbers are less, and who dwell in the same

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Neighbourhood, should *join* in the Expence of a common Teacher, for the Negroes belonging to them. The Society for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts, are sufficiently sensible of the great Importance and Necessity of such an establish'd and regular Provision for the Instruction of the Negroes, and earnestly wish and pray, that it may please God to put it into the Hearts of good Christians, to enable them to assist in the Work, by seasonable Contributions for that End; but at present their Fund does scarce enable them to answer the many Demands of Missionaries, for the Performance of Divine Service in the poorer Settlements, which are not in a Condition to maintain them at their own Charge.

II. But it is further pleaded, that the Instruction of Heathens in the Christian Faith, is in order to their Baptism; and that not only the *Time* to be allowed for instructing them, would be an Abatement from the Profits of their Labour, but also that the *Baptizing* them when instructed, would destroy both the Property which the Masters have in them, as Slaves bought with their Money, and the Right of selling them again at Pleasure; and that the making them Christians, only makes them less diligent, and more ungovernable.

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To which it may be very truly reply'd, that Christianity, and the embracing of the Gospel, does not make the least Alteration in Civil Property, or in any of the Duties which belong to Civil Relations; but in all these Respects, it continues Persons just in the same State as it found them. The Freedom which Christianity gives, is a Freedom from the Bondage of Sin and Satan, and from the Dominion of Mens Lufts and Passions and inordinate Desires; but as to their *outward* Condition, whatever that was before, whether bond or free, their being baptiz'd, and becoming Christians, makes no manner of Change in it: As St. *Paul* has expressly told us, 1 *Cor.* vii. 20. where he is speaking directly to this very Point, *Let every Man abide in the same Calling, wherein he was called;* and at the 24th Verse, *Let every Man wherein he is called, therein abide with God.* And so far is Christianity from discharging Men from the Duties of the Station and Condition in which it found them, that it lays them under stronger Obligations to perform those Duties with the greatest Diligence and Fidelity, not only from the Fear of Men, but from a Sense of Duty to God, and the Belief and Expectation of a future Account. So that to

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say, that Christianity tends to make Men less Observant of their Duty in any Respect, is a Reproach that it is very far from deserving ; and a Reproach, that is confuted by the whole Tenor of the Gospel Precepts, which inculcate upon all, and particularly upon Servants (many of whom were then in the Condition of Slaves) a faithful and diligent Discharge of the Duties belonging to their several Stations, out of Conscience towards God : And it is also confuted by our own Reason, which tells us how much more forcible and constant the Restraint of *Conscience* is, than the Restraint of *Fear* ; and last of all, it is confuted by Experience, which teaches us the great *Value* of those Servants who are truly Religious, compared with those who have no Sense of Religion.

As to their being more ungovernable after Baptism, than before ; it is certain, that the Gospel every where enjoins, not only Diligence and Fidelity, but also *Obedience*, for Conscience Sake ; and does not deprive Masters of any proper Methods of *enforcing* Obedience, where they appear to be necessary. Humanity forbids all cruel and barbarous Treatment of our Fellow-Creatures, and will not suffer us to consider a Being that is endow'd

dow'd with Reason, upon a Level with Brutes; and Christianity takes not out of the Hands of Superiors any Degrees of Strictness and Severity, that fairly appear to be necessary for the preserving Subjection and Government. The general Law, both of Humanity, and of Christianity, is Kindness, Gentleness, and Compassion, towards all Mankind, of what Nation or Condition soever they be; and therefore we are to make the Exercise of those amiable Virtues, our *Choice* and *Desire*, and to have Recourse to severe and rigorous Methods unwillingly, and only out of Necessity. Of this *Necessity*, you yourselves remain the Judges, as much *after* they receive Baptism, as *before*; so that *You* can be in no Danger of suffering by the Change; and, as to *Them*, the greatest Hardships that the most severe Master can inflict upon them, is not to be compar'd to the Cruelty of keeping them in the State of Heathenism, and depriving them of the Means of Salvation, as reach'd forth to *all Mankind* in the Gospel of Christ. And, in Truth, one great Reason why Severity is at all necessary to maintain Government, is the *Want* of Religion in those who are to be govern'd, and who therefore are not to be kept to their Duty by any Thing but *Fear* and *Terror*; than which
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there cannot be a more uneasy State, either to those who govern, or those who are governed.

III. That these Things may make the greater Impression upon you, let me beseech you to consider your selves not only as Masters, but as *Christian* Masters, who stand oblig'd by your Profession to do all that your Station and Condition enable you to do, towards breaking the Power of Satan, and enlarging the Kingdom of Christ; and as having a great Opportunity put into your Hands, of helping-on this Work, by the Influence which God has given you over such a Number of Heathen Idolaters, who still continue under the Dominion of Satan. In the next Place, let me beseech you to consider *Them*, not barely as Slaves, and upon the same Level with labouring Beasts, but as *Men-Slaves* and *Women-Slaves*, who have the same Frame and Faculties with your selves, and have Souls capable of being made eternally happy, and Reason and Understanding to receive Instruction in order to it. If they came from abroad, let it not be said, that they are as far from the Knowledge of Christ in a Christian Country, as when they dwelt among Pagan Idolaters. If they have been born among you, and have never breath'd any
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Air but that of a Christian Countrey, let them not be as much Strangers to Christ, as if they had been transplanted, as soon as born, into a Country of Pagan Idolaters.

Hoping that these and the like Considerations will move you to lay this Matter seriously to Heart, and excite you to use the best Means in your Power towards so good and pious a Work ; I cannot omit to suggest to you one of the best Motives that can be us'd, for disposing the Heathens to embrace Christianity ; and that is, *the good Lives of Christians*. Let them see, in you and your Families, Examples of Sobriety, Temperance and Chastity, and of all the other Virtues and Graces of the Christian Life. Let them observe how strictly you oblige your selves, and all that belong to you, to abstain from Cursing and Swearing, and to keep the Lord's-Day holy, and to attend the publick Worship of God, and the Ordinances which Christ hath appointed in his Gospel. Make them sensible, by the general Tenour of your Behaviour and Conversation, that your inward Temper and Disposition is such as the Gospel requires, that is to say, mild, gentle, and merciful ; and that as oft as you exercise Rigour and Severity, it
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is wholly owing to their Idleness or Obstinacy. By these Means, you will open their Hearts to Instruction, and *prepare* them to receive the Truths of the Gospel ; to which if you add a pious *Endeavour* and *Concern* to see them duly instructed, you may become the Instrument of saving many Souls ; and will not only secure a Blessing from God upon all your Undertakings in this World, but entitle your selves to that distinguishing Reward in the next, which will be given to all those who have been zealous in their Endeavours to promote the Salvation of Men, and enlarge the Kingdom of Christ. And that you may be found in that Number at the great Day of Accounts, is the sincere Desire and earnest Prayer of

May 19.
1727.

Your faithful Friend,

Edm'. London'.